

DRAMA IN THE ENGLISH CLASS

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SUMARY: Nowadays, the ability to communicate in a foreign language is necessary in our society. Consequently, students have to be aware of the importance of learning English, as a human instrument of communication. Thus, teachers must help the students to develop their communicative competences in English and one way to do it is using drama techniques, since they help to reproduce real language and are really motivating for students.

I am going to explain the role of drama techniques as a resource for foreign language learning, the activities they include and the roles and tasks that the teachers must develop.

KEY WORDS: Drama, awakening and expressive techniques, esl classroom, role-playing, simulations, dialogues, group work, motivation.

RESUMEN: Actualmente, la habilidad de comunicarse en una lengua extranjera es necesaria en nuestra sociedad. Nuestros alumnos tienen que ser conscientes de la importancia de aprender inglés como instrumento de comunicación. Así pues, debemos ayudar a nuestros alumnos a desarrollar su competencia comunicativa en inglés y una buena forma de hacerlo es a través del uso de la dramatización, ya que les ayudan a reproducir lenguaje real y son muy motivadoras.

Por ello, explicaré el papel de las técnicas teatrales como recurso para el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, las actividades que incluyen y los roles que los profesores deben desarrollar.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teatro, técnicas de animación y expresión, clase de inglés como lengua extranjera, juego de roles, simulaciones, diálogos, trabajo en grupo, motivación.

1. INTRODUCTION

As we know, it is very important nowadays to learn a foreign language, but it is also a complex and long process. We have to take into account that our students are more and more demotivated. As English teachers we have to look for new ideas and activities in our English classes to motivate our students and make them feel like learning a foreign language. One area which could catch their attention is the use of drama, since it is all around them on television, radio, cinema, the Internet, etc. So why not then incorporate more drama into our English classrooms?

2. AWAKENING AND EXPRESSIVE TECHNIQUES AS A RESOURCE FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING.

Foreign language teaching includes a wide range of activities that involve awakening and expressive techniques. They encourage students to show their language ability and their personal nature by establishing a relationship with the other students in the class. Their implementation is justified by the students' need to communicate using the foreign language in a social context, and their aim is to reproduce communicative situations as similar as possible to real life ones.

Their function is not just to make lessons more exciting or to show the teacher's versatility in planning them, but to make learning more effective. The teacher must always ask himself what activity is most appropriate at a specific moment: role play, games, songs...in order to stimulate the learners' speech using the foreign language.

Awakening techniques enhance social dynamism and interaction. They imply group formation, enhancing social relationships within the groups. On the other hand, expressive techniques include not only linguistic, but body, plastic, rhythmical and musical elements. The inclusion of these non-verbal

elements is easily justifiable within a communicative approach, as theorized in Hymes' concept of communicative competence.

Linguistic and body expressions are most important aspects for the foreign language class. Body language is very important to express certain meanings impossible to transmit with the limited knowledge of the foreign language that our students have, especially beginners.

Therefore, these kind of activities relate real-life situations to the moment and circumstances that the students are experiencing. The students can thus come in contact with the foreign language and its life and culture.

3. PERFORMANCES OF REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS, TALES, CHARACTERS, COMICS, ETC. IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM.

3.1. General considerations.

Awakening and expressive techniques may be a complement to the textbook, and can be used either as warming-ups or as main activities of a session. They include role-playing, simulations of daily life situations, dramatized readings and dialogues, miming, etc. They are especially appropriate for practicing oral skills and English pronunciation.

They also create a positive atmosphere within the classroom, what increases the student's self-confidence. In addition, because they don't feel judged they lose their fear of speaking in a language that they don't master.

Simon Haines in his book, *Projects for EFL Classroom*, published in 1989, in Edinburgh by Nelson, explained that adequate planning and timing are necessary in this type of activities. Students must have a limited time to prepare the specific tasks, otherwise they would always tend to 'need' more time for preparation or to develop whatever they are doing. Within that time limit they must reach a certain goal, clearly defined. Thus, achieving the

goal in time makes the teaching and learning situation more effective, and is motivating for students.

In addition, when basing the lesson planning on awakening or expressive activities, students must know what they are doing and the linguistic and communicative aims of the activities, so that they are conscious of their progress. This awareness of the learning situation, allows students to participate completely in the assessment process for instance with self assessment charts, as they can judge and value if the learning objectives have been achieved.

One of the main objectives of using these techniques is to stimulate the students' participation in communicative activities, which means, overcoming resistance to use the foreign language, and additionally, creating communicative needs. Different aspects of the learning process must be assessed, to see if the main objectives, mentioned before, have been achieved, such as if the students have used the foreign language, if they have enjoyed the activity, if the level of difficulty and the language involved were adequate, etc.

Teachers have to bear in mind how to deal with students mistakes. They must decide what, when and how to correct them. Linguistic accuracy must only be required at the stages of drilling and controlled practice, but with freer communicative activities, only corrections must be done when the students' mistakes impede communication. However, it is also important to give the students positive feedback to give them more confidence.

3.2. Role-playing and simulations.

Role-playing and simulations are drama techniques based on real acting. Although they share most characteristics, there is a clear difference between them.

In role-playings, students don't take part as themselves, but play a role. Any activities involving imaginary situations that encourage students to act, to play a role, constitute a role-playing. There are two types of characters, real and imaginary. For young learners it is easier to use imaginary characters.

According to Adam Maley in his book *Role Play*, published in 1992, in Oxford, by Oxford University Press, there are different types of role-playing. The simplest one consists of making students create short dialogues that they will have to memorise and perform using the language and gestures that the role requires. Another kind of role-playing is the one where students may improvise a performance based on a text that is not a dialogue. And finally, there is another which is freer: students just have few clues about the situation and characters involved, so that they can contribute with their original ideas.

On the other hand, in **simulations**, pupils take place as themselves. They face daily life situations as they would in the real world, following the instructions given about the characteristics of the situation. In addition, they provide students with the opportunity to lose the fear of speaking English in daily life situations.

For both role-playings and simulations, students are usually told what they are supposed to say, more or less, through spoken or written clues, or using pictures related to the functions they have to perform, but they are free to express themselves as they like, so that, students will find the language studied previously more meaningful and dynamic. It is very important to have a clear situation and context. The teacher must take into account aspects such as the type of language that students have to use, the number of pupils that will participate, the situation that is going to be presented, etc. and they must take into account the students' interests and characteristics.

For instance, my students did a simulation when we studied the food. They had to imagine that they were in an English country buying some fruits and vegetables.

This is what we did:

After studying different fruits and vegetables, we studied the English currency (pounds and pences). I showed them some real coins and notes and then I gave them some photocopies of coins for them to paint.



Then, I told them what they had to say both to buy and to sell in shops:

Shop assistant: Good afternoon.

Customer: Good afternoon.

Shop assistant: Can I help you?

Customer: Have you got 3 apples?

Shop assistant: Yes, I have. Here they are.

Customer: How much do they cost?

Shop assistant: 30pence.

Customer: Here you are! Thank you!

Shop assistant: You are welcome. Bye!

Customer: Bye!

Of course, although I gave them a dialogue, it was just to guide them, they could modify it as they wanted. After that, I made pairs. In pairs they had to find out the name of their shop and put the prices they wanted to their food. Furthermore, they had to do lists of food to buy and receipts. Finally they did the simulation for the whole class.



Since I recorded them, they could hear themselves speaking in English, which was really motivating for them. In addition, afterwards we could work on their pronunciation and grammar structures.

3.3. Dialogues.

Dialogues are not communicative activities. They are useful to show a specific linguistic structure, linguistic function or to practise vocabulary. We can find them in textbooks, but they can also be done by the teacher or by the students. There are different ways of exploiting dialogues, such as individual repetitions, reading them aloud, performing them, etc. and they can constitute the main part of a session or of a unit, basing the activities on it or appear just as a complementary activity.

3.4. Drama projects.

Performing a play constitutes a project that increases the students' communicative functions. Pupils learn how to deal with some communicative functions, vocabulary, structures and socio-cultural conventions, and the pronunciation and prosodic feature are properly appreciate and acquired. Language is, thus, learned in a meaningful context. In addition drama makes the students to focus on paralinguistic features, such as gestures, facial expressions, pauses, fillers or interruptions.

Additionally, the drama project favours the students' approach to the literary and cultural world of the foreign language.

It is worth mentioning that drama is a really useful communicative activity when it is not learnt by heart, because when that happens the communicative need is missing. Beginners can use puppets in their drama projects.

There are some web pages such as www.learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org , www.esl-students.com, www.teachingenglishgames.com/eslplays.htm where there are lots of plays written especially for the English as a Foreign Language classroom. These are short and repetitive and designed to involve the whole group, no matter how big or how small. They combine fun and movement with language usage carefully planned to provide optimal speaking practice in real life contexts.

Roles should be assigned according to our students' language ability levels. Children who are more capable and more confident can be given parts with more lines, while shyer children or those with a more limited vocabulary can have fewer lines to say.

Some plays such as **Goldilocks and the Three Little Bears** are very appropriate for students since they are repetitive and students usually know them before doing the play. In www.learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org there are some masks to perform the play, the script and some post activities to do with the children.

According to Charlyn Wessels, in his book *Drama*, published in 1987, in Oxford by Oxford University Press, the benefits of using drama in the foreign language classroom is that they are meaningful and promote a fluent oral interaction, the grammar and vocabulary appear contextualised, and students have an opportunity to increase their confidence in their abilities to learn the foreign language.

However, drama projects present also some drawbacks, such as that they require to be carried out voluntarily, since they require much preparation time, organisation and planning. They demand an extra voluntary effort from teachers and students.

3.5. Other activities that involve awakening and expressive techniques.

There are other daily activities that can be used as awakening and expressive techniques. To make routines fun and more interesting teachers can use drama to begin the classes even outside the classroom. Teachers can pretend to be on a train when going to the English classroom with the students, making train noises and singing songs about trains (such as ***Train's coming***) from Oxford's series ***Teddy's Train***. In addition, they can also pretend to be bus drivers and sing ***"The Wheels on the bus"***.

Once the teacher and the students reach the door of the classroom, teachers can tell the students to say the magic words **"Open sesame"** and until the students say the magic words the door will not open. Teachers can also give the students challenges as they enter or leave the classroom, such as **"touch your nose"**, **"point to your shoes"**, etc. depending on the vocabulary they have studied.

There are some action songs and rhymes that are characterised because pupils have to move and do what is said in their lyrics, matching words to the actions. Language is internalised more easily when it is encoded not only through verbal language, but also through body movement. They are based in the principles of the TPR method (Total Physical Response) devised by James Asher in her book *Learning Another Language Through Actions: The Complete Teacher's Guidebook*, published in 1982 in California, by Sky Oaks Production.

In addition, action songs and rhymes are really useful when children are anxious, or after quiet activities, since they create an appropriate atmosphere in the foreign language classroom.

Different kinds of actions can be performed following these songs, such as miming, pointing to, or touching parts of one's own body such as in the song ***Head and shoulders, knees and toes.***

***“Head, shoulders
Knees and toes x2
Head, shoulders,
Knees and toes x2
Eyes and ears and mouth and nose,
Head, shoulders,
Knees ad toes.”***

Or ***Hokey Cokey:***

***“You put your right hand in,
You put your right hand out,
In, out, in, out
And shake it all about,

You do the Hokey Cokey,
And you turn around,
That's what it's all about.***

Chorus:

***Oh Hokey Cokey, x3
Knees bent, arms straight, rah, rah, rah***

***You put your left hand in...
You put your right food in...
You put your left food in...
You put your whole self in...”***

4. GROUP WORK IN CREATIVE ACTIVITIES.

As I have already commented, awakening and expressive techniques can be done in groups. One of the main objectives of working in groups is that students feel and are responsible for their own work and for their own learning process.

Working in groups when developing these techniques have several advantages, such as that students have more language practice time and that they are suitable for dealing with diversity within the classroom as they can be carried out at different levels of language proficiency. The teaching objectives may be the same for all students, but every pupil can carry out their own work in different ways, adapted to their characteristics. Thus, it is necessary to prepare some activities for those students who finish first, so that they keep busy while the rest of the class finishes, or they can use the English corners. Other ways of grouping the students is in a heterogeneous way, including students with different levels of proficiency.

According to Jeremy Harmer, in his book *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, published in 1991 in London by Longman, it is advisable to have a leader in each group to contact with the teacher when some instructions must be transmitted to the group, in order to avoid the interruption of what they are doing, and to save time.

The teacher must control that all students participate, which involves motivational aspects and the existence and preparation of tasks, adapted to their interests and characteristics. Therefore, continuous assessment is necessary for the students to follow a similar rhythm of work.

Finally, I would like to mention one of the problems that teachers must face: the noise. The teacher must train the students to speak quietly in order to

maintain a calm atmosphere within the classroom and to avoid disturbing the other classes.

5. TEACHER'S ROLE.

The use of awakening and expressive techniques helps to break down the barriers between teacher and students. Usually, in these type of techniques, the teacher has a less dominant role than in more traditional activities.

According to Jean Brewster, Gail Ellis and Denis Girard in their book *The Primary English Teacher's Guide*, published in 1992 in London by Penguin, the teacher must assume several roles in communicative language teaching such as:

- Needs analyst: The lesson planning must part from the students' level of foreign language knowledge, and from their level of personal development (psychological, social, etc.). The teacher must diagnose what language items should be reviewed or practised, which ones introduced, etc. and design appropriate activities to fulfil these needs.
- Informant: The teacher must be a model to be imitated, especially as a source of correct patterns at the foreign language. In addition, they have to provide the students with different kind of information when they need it.
- Corrector: The teacher must correct those mistakes which interfere in the communicative process of the students to help them to communicate, but these explanations and corrections must be short.
- Negotiator: Once designed the minimum objectives to be achieved, the teacher may decide if the students can participate in the elaboration of the last stages of the lesson planning. The teacher can allow students a higher or lower power of decisions (maybe they can decide the kind of grouping, the materials to use, activities to develop, rules of behaviour etc.). These decisions can be made in the class assembly. However, at the end it all depends on the teacher.

In the end, the teacher's main role consist in facilitating the communicative process within the classroom, as it is thanks to this process that students will achieve their learning objectives.

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